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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000261

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP AND S/WCI

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [OPDC](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: S/WCI AMBASSADOR WILLIAMSON'S VISIT TO MUSCAT

REF: A) STATE 23825; B) MUSCAT 73

CLASSIFIED BY: L. Victor Hurtado, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S.
Department of State, U.S. Embassy - Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (S) Summary: Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues Clint Williamson and the Charge d'Affaires met March 18 with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Humoud al-Busaidi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary General, to deliver ref A letter from the Secretary. The Secretary General stated unequivocally that Oman would not accept detainees as a matter of principle. He further provided his view that U.S. regional relations would be best served by returning all detainees to their countries of origin despite the possibility of mistreatment. At the same time, Sayyid Badr agreed to consider raising Saudi acceptance of Yemeni detainees at a rehabilitation center near the Saudi-Yemen border in future meetings with Yemeni counterparts. End Summary.

¶2. (S) Ambassador Williamson met with the MFA Secretary General to express his thanks for the Government of Oman's prior consideration of acceptance of Guantanamo detainees, and to deliver ref A letter from the Secretary to the Foreign Minister asking for renewed consideration of the issue. [Note: Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi was unavailable to meet with Ambassador Williamson due to the visit on the same day of Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and the arrival of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. End Note.] The Ambassador noted that since the change of administration, President Obama had made closing the facility one of his highest foreign policy priorities, as indicated by his signing of an Executive Order his second day in office. Ambassador Williamson said that in order for the U.S. to be successful in closing Guantanamo, we would need the assistance of friends and allies, and requested Oman's help to resettle detainees who could not be returned to their home countries due to humane treatment concerns. Sayyid Badr expressed approval of the closure decision, but said that Oman's position had not changed since S/WCI representative Jason Gorey's visit to Muscat on January 7, 2009 (ref B). Oman would not accept any detainee from Guantanamo Bay "as a matter of principle." While acknowledging concerns over the possible mistreatment of returned detainees in some of their countries of origin, he opined that this was a concern primarily to the U.S. and Europe, not to Arab countries. Still more, it was hypocritical to now worry about treatment of the detainees given reports of their mistreatment at the hands of the U.S. Credibility in the region would be best served by sending all detainees home and closing the detention facility as soon as possible. Guantanamo, he believed, was a complicated issue that should not be further complicated with attempts at third party resettlement.

¶3. (S) Ambassador Williamson thanked the Secretary General for his frank and open statements, but highlighted that the U.S. had legal obligations which prohibited returning the detainees to home countries where they could be mistreated. He further noted that previous allegations of torture had damaged U.S. credibility in the region, and that returning detainees to be tortured in their home

countries now would only compound the problem. While Guantanamo had represented a difficult chapter in U.S. history, President Obama had undertaken to close facility in a responsible fashion and not do anything in the process that would exacerbate an already sensitive situation.

¶4. (S) Noting Oman's interest in stability in Yemen given their shared border, Ambassador Williamson explained that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had failed to convince Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to permit the transfer of 99 Yemeni detainees to a rehabilitation facility in Saudi Arabia near the Yemeni border. This seemed to be the best option for transfer out of Guantanamo as Yemen lacked an effective rehabilitation program and had a limited ability to keep track of these individuals. Ambassador Williamson asked if Sayyid Badr could help encourage Yemen to work toward a compromise with the U.S. and the Saudis on this issue, which would have security benefits for Oman as well. Sayyid Badr said that he had recently discussed this topic with the Yemeni Foreign Minister and believed that the detainees should be sent home. To help minimize the possibility that these Yemenis (and future trouble-makers) would take flight and/or resume their violent activities, Sayyid Badr suggested that the U.S. consider aiding the Yemeni government to develop a rehabilitation capability of its own. Ambassador Williamson agreed that this was a desired end-state, however it would take some time to develop. The Saudis, he noted, had agreed to run their facility jointly with the Yemenis to assist with capacity building. This would be a near-term solution allowing for a more immediate transfer of the Yemenis closer to home while a rehabilitation center and professional capability was developed in Yemen. Sayyid Badr agreed that this idea had some merit and said he would consider bringing it up in

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future meetings with Yemeni counterparts.

¶5. (C) Comment: While the Omani response to Ambassador Williamson's request is not what we were looking for, it should not be taken as a conscious decision to be unhelpful. Sayyid Badr left open the possibility that he may engage Yemen at some level with respect to the 99 detainees going to Saudi Arabia. His frank comments about U.S. credibility in the region and Arab opinion on returning detainees to possible mistreatment in countries of origin may be a valuable window into the true sentiments of governments in the region which went unspoken at other meetings in the name of diplomatic propriety. Oman's position is very much in line with the Sultanate's traditional foreign policy approach of steering clear of controversial issues that do not directly affect its national interests and refraining from "interfering" (in a broad sense) in the internal matters of other countries. As the Omanis have taken a firm position based on "principle," further appeals to Muscat to resettle Guantanamo detainees will almost assuredly prove fruitless. On March 29, the Sultan's Special Advisor on External Affairs, Dr. Omar Zawawi, reiterated to Ambassador Grappo that Oman was not prepared to accept any detainees from Guantanamo. In the event we choose to pursue this issue, which post recommends against, U.S. intervention must be made at the highest level. End Comment.

¶5. (U) Ambassador Williamson has cleared on this message.
GRAPPO